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GLEANINGS
FROM
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DUGALD STEWART'S WORKS,
WITH ADDITIONS.

OUR DUTIES TO GOD.

SELECTED, PREPARED AND PUBLISHED

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GLEANINGS.

FROM

DUGALD STEWART'S WORKS, WITH ADDITIONS.

OUR DUTIES TO GOD.

THE study of philosophy in all its various branches, both natural and moral, affords at every step a new illustration of the subject to which these investigations relate, insomuch that the truths of natural religion gain an accession of evidence from every addition that is made to the stock of human knowledge.

In considering the universe with a view to the illustration of the wisdom and unity of God, it is, in a peculiar degree, satisfactory to trace the relations which different parts of it bear to each other, and to remark the concurrence of things, apparently unconnected and even remote, in promoting the same benevolent purposes.

The adaptation of the bodies and of the instincts of animals to those particular climates and districts of the earth for which they are destined.

The relations subsisting between particular animals and particular vegetables; the latter furnishing to the former salutary food in their healthful state and useful remedies in the case of disease.

The relations which different tribes of animals bear to each other, one tribe being the natural prey of another, and each of them having their instruments of offence or defence provided accordingly.

The relations which the periodical instincts of migrating animals bear to the state of the season, and to the vegetable productions of distant parts of the globe.

This view of the subject is peculiarly striking when we consider the relations which subsist between the nature of man and the circumstances of his external situation. An examination of his perceptive faculties in particular, and of his intellectual powers as they are adapted to the structure and to the laws of the material world, opens a wide field of curious speculation.

The accommodation of the objects around

him to his appetites, to his physical wants, and to his capacities of enjoyment, is no less wonderful, and exceeds so far what we observe in the case of other animals as to authorize us to conclude that it was chiefly with a view to his happiness and improvement that the arrangements of this lower world were made.

Interesting as these physical speculations may be, it is still more delightful to trace the uniformity of design which is displayed in the *moral* world; to compare the arts of human life with the instincts of the brutes, and the instincts of the different tribes of brutes with each other; and to remark, amidst the astonishing variety of means which are employed to accomplish the same ends, a certain analogy characterize them all, or to observe, in the minds of different individuals of our own species, the workings of the same affections and passions, and to trace the uniformity of their operation in men of different ages and countries. It is this which gives the great charm to what we call *nature* in epic and dramatic composition, when the poet speaks a language to which every heart is an echo, and which, amidst all the effects of education and fashion in modifying and disguising the principles of our constitution, reminds all the various classes

of readers or of spectators of the existence of those moral ties which unite us to each other and to our common Parent.

OF THE EVIDENCES OF BENEVOLENT DESIGN IN THE UNIVERSE.

OUR ideas of the moral attributes of God must be derived from our own moral perceptions. It is only by attending to these that we can form a conception of what His attributes are, and it is in this way we are furnished with the strongest proofs that they really belong to Him.

The peculiar sentiment of approbation with which we regard the virtue of beneficence in others, and the peculiar satisfaction with which we reflect on such of our own actions as have contributed to the happiness of mankind — to which we may add the exquisite pleasure accompanying the exercise of all the kind affections — naturally lead us to consider benevolence or goodness as the supreme attribute of the Deity. It is difficult, indeed, to conceive what other motive could have induced a Being,

completely and independently happy, to have called His creatures into existence.

In this manner, without any examination of the fact, we have a strong presumption for the goodness of the Deity, and it is only after establishing this presumption *a priori* that we can proceed to examine the fact with safety. It is true, indeed, that, independently of this presumption, the disorders we see would not demonstrate ill intention in the Author of the universe, as it would still be possible that these might contribute to the happiness and the perfection of the whole system.

The Manicheans account for the mixture of good and evil in the universe by the opposite agencies of two co-eternal and independent principles. Their doctrine has been examined and refuted by many authors by reasoning *a priori*; but the most satisfactory of all refutations is its obvious inconsistency with that unity of design which is everywhere conspicuous in nature.

The fundamental principle of the Optimists is that all events are ordered for the best, and that the evils which we suffer are parts of a great system conducted by almighty power under the direction of infinite wisdom and goodness.

Under this general title, however, are com-

prehended two very different descriptions of philosophers, those who admit and those who deny the freedom of human actions. The former only contend that everything is right so far as it is the work of God, and endeavor to show that the creation of beings endowed with free will, and consequently liable to moral delinquency—and the government of the world by general laws, from which occasional evils must result—furnish no solid objection to the perfection of the universe.

But they hold, at the same time, that although the permission of moral evil does not detract from the goodness of God, it is nevertheless imputable to man as a fault, and renders him justly obnoxious to punishment. This was the system of Plato, and of the best of the ancient philosophers, who, in most instances, state their doctrine in a manner perfectly consistent with man's free will and moral agency.

All the different subjects of human complaint may be reduced to two classes: moral and physical evils. The former comprehends those which arise from the abuse of free will; the latter, those which result from the established laws of nature, and which man cannot prevent by his own efforts.

According to the definition now given of

moral evil, the question with respect to its permission is reduced to this: Why was man made a free agent? A question to which it seems to be a sufficient reply: That perhaps the object of the Deity in the government of the world is not merely to communicate happiness, but to form His creatures to moral excellence, or that the enjoyment of high degrees of happiness may perhaps necessarily require the previous acquisition of virtuous habits.

The sufferings produced by vice are, on this supposition, instances of the goodness of God, no less than the happiness resulting from virtue.

These observations justify Providence, not only for the permission of moral evil, but for the permission of many things which we commonly complain of as physical evils. How great is the proportion of these, which we commonly complain of as physical evils. How great is the proportion of these, which are the obvious consequences of our vices and our prejudices, and which, so far from being a necessary part of the order of nature, seem intended to operate in the progress of human affairs as a gradual remedy against the causes which produce them.

Some of our other complaints with respect to the lot of humanity will be found, on examina-

tion, to arise from partial views of the constitution of man, and from a want of attention to the circumstances which constitute his happiness or promote his improvement.

Thus it appears not only, that partial evils *may be good* with respect to the whole system, but that their tendency *is* beneficial on the whole, even to that small part of it which we see.

The distinction between right and wrong is apprehended by the mind to be eternal and immutable, no less than the distinction between mathematical truth and falsehood. To argue, therefore, from our own moral judgments to the administration of the Deity, cannot be justly censured as a rash extension to the Divine nature of suggestions resulting from the arbitrary constitution of our own minds.

The power we have of conceiving this distinction is one of the most remarkable of those which raise us above the brutes, and the sense of obligation which it involves possesses a distinguished pre-eminence over all our other principles of action. To act in conformity to our sense of rectitude is plainly the highest excellence which our nature is capable of attaining, nor can we avoid extending the same rule of estimation to all intelligent beings whatever.

Besides these conclusions with respect to the Divine attributes — which seem to be implied in our very perception of moral distinctions — there are others, perfectly agreeable to them, which continually force themselves on the mind in the exercise of our moral judgments, both with respect to our own conduct and that of other men. The reverence which we feel to be due to the admonitions of conscience ; the sense of merit and demerit which accompanies our good and bad actions ; the warm interest we take in the fortunes of the virtuous ; the indignation we feel at the occasional triumphs of successful villainy : all imply a secret conviction of the moral administration of the universe.

An examination of the ordinary course of human affairs adds to the force of these considerations, and furnishes a proof from the fact that, notwithstanding the seemingly promiscuous distribution of happiness and misery in this life, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice are the great objects of all the general laws by which the world is governed. The disorders, in the meantime,—which, in such a world as ours, cannot fail to arise in particular instances when they are compared with our natural sense of good and of ill de-

sert — afford a presumption that in a future state the moral government which we see begun here will be carried into complete execution.

After the view which has been given of the principles of natural religion, little remains to be added concerning the duties which respect the Deity. To employ our faculties in studying those evidences of power, of wisdom, and of goodness which He has displayed in His works, as it is the foundation in other instances of our sense of religious obligation, so it is in itself a duty incumbent on us as reasonable and moral beings, capable of recognising the existence of an almighty cause and of feeling corresponding sentiments of devotion. By those who entertain just opinions on this most important of all subjects, the following practical consequences, which comprehend some of the chief effects of religion on the temper and conduct, will be readily admitted as self-evident propositions.

In the first place : If the Deity be possessed of infinite moral excellence, we must feel towards Him, in an infinite degree, all those affections of love, gratitude, and confidence which are excited by the imperfect worth

we observe among our fellow-creatures ; for it is by conceiving all that is benevolent and amiable in man, raised to the highest perfection, that we can alone form some faint notion of the Divine nature. To cultivate, therefore, an habitual love and reverence of the Supreme Being, may be justly considered as the first great branch of morality ; nor is the virtue of that man complete, or even consistent with itself, in whose mind these sentiments of piety are wanting.

Secondly : Although religion can with no propriety be considered as the sole foundation of morality, yet when we are convinced that God is infinitely good, and that He is the friend and protector of virtue, this belief affords the most powerful inducements to the practice of every branch of our duty. It leads us to consider conscience as the vicegerent of God, and to listen to its suggestion as to the commands of that Being from whom we have received our existence, and the great object of whose government is to promote the happiness and the perfection of His whole creation.

That the practice of veracity and justice, and of all our other duties, is useful to mankind, is acknowledged by moralists of all descriptions ; and there is good reason for believing that if a

person saw all the consequences of his actions, he would perceive that an adherence to their rules is useful and advantageous on the whole, even in those cases in which his limited views incline him to think otherwise. It is *possible* that in the Deity benevolence, or a regard to utility, may be the sole principle of action, and that the ultimate end for which He enjoined to His creatures the duties of veracity and justice was to secure their own happiness ; but still, with respect to man, they are indispensable laws, for he has an immediate perception of their rectitude. Where they are possessed in an eminent degree, we may perhaps consider them as a ground of moral esteem, because they indicate the pains which have been bestowed on their cultivation, and a course of active virtue in which they have been exercised and strengthened.

In truth, all those offices, whether apparently trifling or important, by which the happiness of other men is affected — civility, gentleness, kindness, humanity, patriotism, universal benevolence — are only diversified expressions of the same disposition, according to the circumstances in which it operates and the relations which the agent bears to others.

OF VERACITY.

THE important rank which veracity holds among our social duties, appears from the obvious consequences that would result if no foundation were laid for it in the constitution of our nature. The purposes of speech would be frustrated, and every man's opportunities of knowledge would be limited to his own personal experience.

Considerations of utility, however, do not seem to be the only ground of the approbation we bestow on this disposition. Abstracting from all regard to consequences, there is something pleasing and amiable in sincerity, openness, and truth; something disagreeable and disgusting in duplicity, equivocation, and falsehood.

That there is in the human mind a natural or instinctive principle of veracity has been remarked by many authors, the same part of our constitution which prompts to social intercourse prompting also to sincerity in our mutual communications. Truth is always the spontaneous and native expression of our sentiments, whereas falsehood implies a certain violence done to our nature in consequence of

the influence of some motive which we are anxious to conceal.

[Accordingly it is remarked both by Reid and Smith, that the greatest liars, where they lie once, they speak truth a hundred times.]

Corresponding to this instinctive principle of veracity, there is a principle — coeval with the use of language — determining us to repose faith in testimony. Without such a disposition the education of children would be impracticable; and, accordingly, so far from being the result of experience, it seems to be, in the first instance, unlimited, nature intrusting its gradual correction to the progress of reason and observation. It bears a striking analogy, both in its origin and in its final cause, to our instinctive expectation of the continuance of those laws which regulate the course of physical events.

[As this principle *presupposes* the general practice of veracity, it may be regarded as an additional intimation of that conduct which is conformable to the end and destination of our being.]

It would appear that every breach of veracity indicates some latent vice, or some criminal intention, which an individual is ashamed to avow. And hence the peculiar beauty of openness or sincerity, uniting, in some degree, in

itself, the graces of all the other moral qualities of which it attests the existence.

The practice of veracity is secured, to a considerable extent, in modern Europe, by the received maxims of honor which brand with infamy every palpable deviation from the truth in matters of fact or in the fulfilment of promises. Veracity, however, considered as a moral duty, is not confined to sincerity in the use of speech, but prohibits every circumstance in our external conduct which is calculated to mislead others by conveying to them false information. It prohibits, in like manner, the wilful employment of sophistry in an argument, no less than a wilful misrepresentation of fact. The fashion of the times may establish distinctions in these different cases, but none of them are sanctioned by the principles of morality.

The same disposition of mind which leads to the practice of veracity in our commerce with the world, cherishes the love of truth in our philosophical inquiries. This active principle, which is indeed but another name for the principle of curiosity, seems also to be an ultimate fact in the human frame.

Although, however, in its first origin not resolvable into views of utility, the gradual discovery of its extensive effects on human im-

provement cannot fail to confirm and to augment its native influence on the mind. The connexion between error and misery, between truth and happiness, becomes more apparent as our researches proceed, producing at last a complete conviction that even in those cases where we are unable to trace it the connexion subsists, and encouraging the free and unbiassed exercise of our rational powers as an expression at once of benevolence to man and of confidence in the righteous administration of the universe.

Prudence, temperance, and fortitude are no less requisite for enabling us to discharge our social duties than for securing our own private happiness.

A steady regard, in the conduct of life, to the happiness and perfection of our own nature, and a diligent study of the means by which these ends may be attained, is another duty belonging to this branch of virtue. It is a duty so important and comprehensive, that it leads to the practice of all the rest; and is therefore entitled to a very full and particular examination in a system of Moral Philosophy. Such an examination leads our thoughts "to the end and aim of our being."

That the principle of self-love — or, in other

words, the desire of happiness — is neither an object of approbation nor of blame, is sufficiently obvious. It is inseparable from the nature of man, as a rational and a sensitive being.

It is, however, no less obvious, on the other hand, that this desire, considered as a principle of action, has by no means a uniform influence on the conduct.

Our animal appetites, our affections, and the other inferior principles of our nature, interfere as often with self-love as with benevolence, and mislead us from our own happiness as much as from the duties we owe to others.

The most superficial observation of life is sufficient to convince us that happiness is not to be attained by giving every appetite and desire the gratification they demand, and that it is necessary for us to form to ourselves some plan or system of conduct in subordination to which all other objects are to be pursued.

The Stoics placed the supreme good in rectitude of conduct without any regard to the event.

They did not, however, recommend an indifference to external objects, or a life of inactivity and apathy; but on the contrary, they taught that nature pointed out to us certain objects of choice and rejection, and amongst these, some

as more to be chosen and avoided than others ; and that virtue consisted in choosing and rejecting objects according to their intrinsic value. They only contended that these objects should be pursued, not as the means of our happiness, but because we believe it to be agreeable to nature that we should pursue them, and that therefore when we have done our utmost, we should regard the event as indifferent.

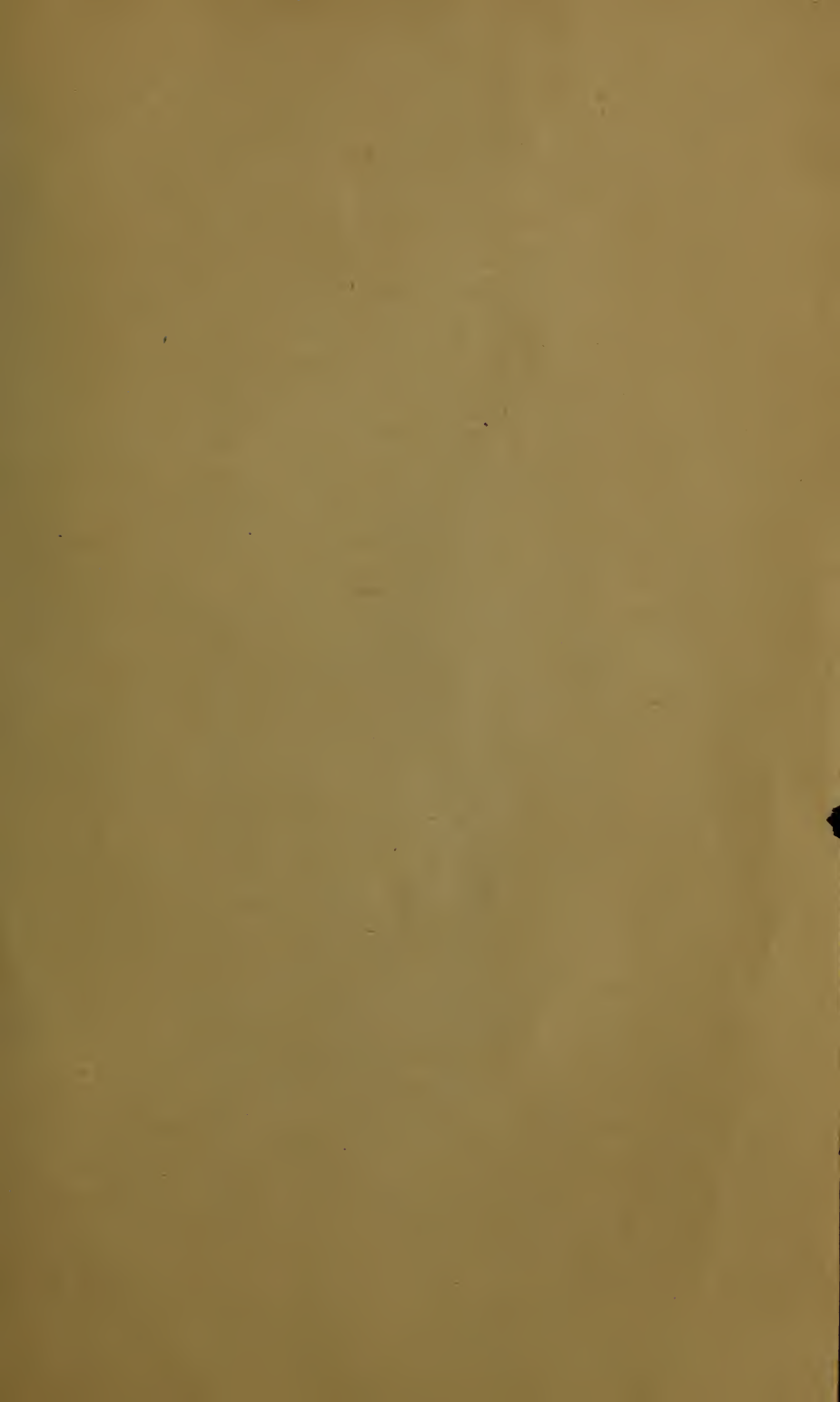
The scale of desirable objects exhibited in this system was peculiarly calculated to encourage the social virtues. It taught that the prosperity of two was preferable to that of one, that of a city to that of a family, and that of our country to all partial considerations. On this principle, added to a sublime sentiment of piety, it founded its chief argument for an entire resignation to the dispensations of Providence. As all events are ordered by perfect wisdom and goodness, the Stoics concluded that whatever happens is calculated to produce the greatest possible good to the universe in general.

As it is agreeable, therefore, to nature that we should prefer the happiness of many to that of a few, and of all to that of many, they concluded that every event which happens is precisely that which we ourselves would have desired if we had been acquainted with the whole scheme of the Divine administration.

While the Stoics held this elevated language, they acknowledged the weaknesses of humanity, but insisted that it is the business of the philosopher to delineate what is perfect, without lowering the dignity of virtue by limitations arising from the frailties of mankind.

In the greater part of these opinions, the Peripatetics agreed with the Stoics. They admitted that virtue ought to be the law of our conduct, and that no other good was to be compared to it; but they did not represent it as the sole good, nor affect a total indifference to things external.

From the slight view now given of the systems of philosophers with respect to the sovereign good, it may be assumed as an acknowledged and indisputable fact that happiness arises chiefly from the mind. The Stoics perhaps expressed this too strongly when they said that to a wise man external circumstances are indifferent. Yet it must be confessed that happiness depends much less on these than is commonly imagined; and that as there is no situation so prosperous as to exclude the torments of malice, cowardice and remorse, so there is none so adverse as to withhold the enjoyment of a benevolent, resolute, and upright heart.



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